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Secretary Shultz

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Nicaragua and the Future of Central America

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Following is an address by Secretary Shultz before the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Washington, D.C., March 3, 1986.

In recent years, around the world, we have seen the yearning for freedom take extraordinary forms. Last week, the world watched as the people of the Philippines rose up to claim their democratic rights and recapture their democratic heritage.

We saw in the Philippines a government increasingly at odds with its own people. We saw a Catholic Church, a middle class, moderate opposition parties, the business community, the media, and other segments of society increasingly disaffected from their government. We saw an election in which the government was shaken by the vigor of the opposition's campaign and sought by fraud to perpetuate itself in power. We can be thankful that as his moral authority slipped away, President Marcos had the wisdom and courage to step down peacefully.

Today, we see similar phenomena in a country much closer to home—Nicaragua. But with a striking difference: it's *far worse* in Nicaragua. There, opposition parties have been systematically harassed and intimidated, including by violence or threat of violence; independent media are not merely hampered but censored or shut down; the Catholic Church has been stifled or abused for being a voice of democratic conscience. The secret police have rounded up leaders of private sector, labor, and church organizations, subjecting them to interrogations and threats. A massive military buildup by the Soviet Union and Cuba threatens not only the regime's internal opponents but all neighboring countries as well. And the regime—after a manipulated election over a year ago—is clearly determined to maintain itself in power by whatever brute force is necessary.

In the Philippines, the forces of democracy were able to rally, organize, compete for and, eventually, win power peacefully, despite the flawed election, because it was, at bottom, a pluralist democratic political system. In Nicaragua, once the communist regime consolidates its power, the forces of democracy will have no such hope. A Leninist regime seeks a monopoly of power and the strangulation of all independent institutions. The church, the independent media, the business community, the middle class, and democratic parties are all severely beleaguered and struggling for their very survival. Thousands of the regime's opponents—estimated at as many as 20,000—have been driven to take up arms to resist the communist attempt to consolidate a totalitarian system.

For historical, moral, and strategic reasons, the United States took a direct interest in the progress of Filipino democracy. For similar reasons, we are deeply concerned with the hopes for democracy in Nicaragua. After 6½ years, it is clear that, without our help in strengthening the Nicaraguan democratic opposition, hope for democracy in Nicaragua is doomed and progress elsewhere in Central America could be undone.

Subversion Abroad

Despite our efforts to coexist with, and even aid, the revolutionary leadership that overthrew the dictator Somoza in 1979, the strategic threat posed by the Nicaraguan communists has grown steadily. Today, the country is home to some 200 Soviet advisers, some 7,500 Cubans, and assorted personnel from East Germany, Bulgaria, Libya, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). You can see who its friends are.

Nicaragua's military machine has no parallel in the history of Central America. Since 1981, the country has received more than half a billion dollars in Soviet arms shipments, including tanks and other heavy armaments that, in the context of Central America, are clearly not defensive. By the end of 1980, Nicaragua's Armed Forces were twice as large as the Somoza National Guard at its height. By the end of 1982, the army of the Nicaraguan communists had doubled again. Today, Nicaragua has some 60,000 troops on active duty and 60,000 more in reserves. Honduras, by contrast, has 21,000 troops; Costa Rica, the oldest democracy in Latin America, has no army. No other country in Central America has as many tanks and armored vehicles as Nicaragua. Only Nicaragua has one of the most

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sophisticated attack helicopters in the world, the Soviet-built Mi-24 HIND.

Why such a formidable buildup? [Interior Minister] Tomas Borge gave the answer in 1981. "This revolution," he said, "goes beyond our borders."

What do these words mean? Look at the record. Almost immediately, the communists in Nicaragua joined with Salvadoran communists to prevent democratic reforms in El Salvador. They armed guerrillas who maintained their central headquarters in Managua until late 1983. (Incidentally, they moved not long after our liberation of Grenada). And they still maintain radio transmitters, training facilities, R&R camps, and major logistics support facilities in Nicaragua.

But for the Nicaraguan communists, subverting El Salvador has not been enough. Nicaragua has also been equipping, training, organizing, and infiltrating guerrillas and agents into Honduras. It has launched direct attacks into that country using its regular armed forces.

Costa Rica is another target. The Nicaraguan communists have used their diplomatic presence in Costa Rica to conduct bombings and assassinations; they have financed, equipped, and trained Costa Ricans for subversive activities; and they have conducted cross-border incursions almost at will.

They are also involved in Colombia. Many of the arms with which the M-19 terrorists attacked the National Palace of Justice have been traced to Nicaragua. And what were the M-19 terrorists after? Just those Justices trying drug traffickers. It should be no surprise to find that the Nicaraguan communists are involved in this criminal activity.

Think about the pattern that emerges from this record. It is violent. It is indiscriminate, aimed at democracies and even Contadora peacemakers. And it is intimately tied to Cuban and Soviet military power. These efforts at subversion and infiltration are facilitated by the regime's close relations with terrorists from across the globe. It has issued Nicaraguan passports to radicals and terrorists from the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe. Groups with a known presence in Nicaragua include the Basque ETA terrorists, the German Baader-Meinhof gang, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Argentine Montoneros. Alvaro Baldizon, a high-ranking Sandinista who defected in 1985, reported that Interior Minister Borge is personally involved in cocaine smuggling from Colombia to the United States. Videotapes by a DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] informer on the ground in Nicaragua show at least one other regime official personally supervising the loading of a narcotics shipment for the United States.

Agents of the PLO working in Central America and Panama use Nicaragua as their base of operations. Their ties to the PLO are particularly strong. Some were trained in PLO camps in the 1960s and 1970s. Some have even participated in PLO hijackings.

The Nicaraguan communists have another benefactor in the Middle East: Libya. By the time they took power in 1979, they had developed a direct relationship with Qadhafi. And Qadhafi has obligingly sent them arms. One shipment labeled "medicines" was intercepted by accident in Brazil in April 1983; authorities found about 84 tons of arms, explosives, and other military equipment.

Repression at Home

By betraying their promises of pluralism, the Nicaraguan communists have forced the citizens of Nicaragua to take up arms once again. Like Somoza, they don't seem to listen to anyone who isn't armed. And, like Somoza, they seek to blame outside forces for the resistance of their own people to their policies.

The Nicaraguan communists like to say that covert U.S. support created the resistance; that their opponents are all agents of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and heirs of Somoza. This is nonsense. It was their repression that in 1979, 1980, and 1981 destroyed the coalition that overthrew Somoza and sparked the resistance. In 1979, 1980, and 1981, the United States was providing aid to the Government of Nicaragua, not to the resistance.

From mid-1984 until late in 1985—well over a year—the U.S. Government provided no aid to Nicaraguan resistance forces. During that time, the resistance grew by 50%, roughly from 10,000 to 15,000. So much for the theory that the resistance is a creature of U.S. cash.

Who are these Nicaraguans who are willing to risk their lives against the communist security apparatus? The resistance fighters are overwhelmingly rural youths. Most are between 18 and 22 years old. They are fighting to defend their small plots of land, their churches and, in some cases, their indigenous cultures. Some joined the resistance rather than be forced by the Nicaraguan communists to fight against their friends and neighbors. In defending their families and communities, these young Nicaraguans are fighting for self-determination above all else.

Their leaders are more likely to come from urban areas and have more diverse occupations and backgrounds. They include both former National Guardsmen and former Sandinista fighters, but most are civilians from the very groups the communists claim to represent: peasants, small farmers, urban professionals, and students. One was a primary school teacher; another, an evangelical pastor.

An analysis of the backgrounds of the 153 most senior military leaders of the largest resistance group last November shows that 53% were civilians, 27% served in the National Guard, and a full 20% were former comrades-in-arms of the communists themselves.

The evidence irrefutably confirms that the Nicaraguan resistance is the product of a popular, pervasive, and democratic revolt.

A Tide of Democracy

Historians will detect an irony in the changing course of Latin American tyranny throughout these years. While Nicaragua was trading one dictatorship for another, strongmen elsewhere in the region were falling in rapid succession. In the past decade, elected civilian governments have replaced authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru, and Uruguay. Over 90% of the people of Latin America now enjoy self-government, as opposed to less than one-third 10 years ago.

The contrast between communist rule in Nicaragua and the political trend in the rest of Latin America could not be more dramatic. After centuries of struggle, self-government has taken root. Now, Nicaragua is not only the odd man out; its policies of militarism and subversion place all the region's hopes for democracy at risk.

No one is more aware of that risk than the leaders of Latin America. For years, they have been searching for a way of defusing the threat from Nicaragua. Indeed, the central purpose of the Contadora negotiations is to ensure that military tensions created by the Nicaraguan regime's behavior can be overcome peacefully and democratically without the widening conflict the Nicaraguan communists seem bent on provoking.

Not surprisingly, the communists have consistently torpedoed these negotiations. In 1984, the United States pursued direct negotiations with Managua in an attempt to help the Contadora nations negotiate a settlement. Nine rounds of talks were held over 5 months. But the Nicaraguan communists proved mainly interested in manipulating the bilateral talks to short-circuit the Contadora process.

They have also refused the proposal of the country's Roman Catholic bishops, made in their 1984 Good Friday pastoral letter, to negotiate with all Nicaraguans—armed and unarmed, inside Nicaragua and outside of it. The democratic resistance called for a cease-fire and agreed to negotiations mediated by the Catholic Church. The regime refused. So the dialogue that counts the most—the internal dialogue between the regime and its opponents—is stymied by the regime's intransigence. The communists know what they want and have no intention of changing.

Nicaragua's neighbors are well aware of the regime's intentions. So are we. And we are profoundly concerned with the threat Nicaragua poses to the security and well-being of other Latin American nations. We have been deeply involved with encouraging democracy throughout Central and South America, supporting free elections and giving moral and economic support to democratic governments and democratic forces. And like our democratic neighbors, we don't want to see these gains rolled back by Nicaraguan subversion.

Just 2 weeks ago, I met with representatives from the eight nations involved in the Contadora negotiations. They are committed, as we are, to political solutions. But there is no mistaking their grave concern about Soviet and Cuban support for Nicaragua's attempts to undermine regional stability.

U.S. Policy

Our objectives in Nicaragua, and the objectives of our friends and allies, are straightforward. We want the Nicaraguan regime to reverse its military buildup, to send its foreign advisers home, and to stop oppressing its citizens and subverting its neighbors. We want it to keep the promises of the coalition government that followed Somoza's fall: democratic pluralism at home and peaceful relations abroad.

The United States and its friends have sought these objectives through diplomacy. We continue to believe that a negotiated settlement represents the ultimate hope for peaceful change in Nicaragua. But all serious efforts at negotiation have been blocked by the Nicaraguan communists. They believe that they can continue their domestic oppression and foreign aggression with impunity, and they continue to regard their military might as their guarantee of success. The United States has the power to help Nicaraguan freedom fighters convince the communists that their course is disastrous. We must give them help before it is too late. And when we do that, we increase our leverage in support of our diplomatic objectives.

Our goals are limited and reasonable. They are also essential for our values and our security and those of our neighbors. We must consider many options. Some are so stern that we hope never to resort to them. The United States does not want its own military directly involved in Nicaragua. So far, we have not had to consider this option, because we know there is another way of discouraging the regime from its destructive course. That is why we support the democratic resistance.

Military help for the democratic resistance will give the Nicaraguan communists an incentive to negotiate seriously—something they have yet to do. They did not negotiate with the Carter Administration when the United States was Nicaragua's largest supplier of aid. And they did not negotiate seriously either with us or with their neighbors when the Congress suspended all aid to the resistance 2 years ago. On the contrary, in the fall of 1984, instead of bringing their political opponents back into the political process through competitive elections, they imported assault helicopters from the Soviet Union.

The resistance finds itself at a critical juncture. They have proven themselves by their extraordinary growth and by the desperate measures to which the regime has been driven to combat them. But the Soviet, Cuban, and Eastern-bloc military buildup confronts them with unfair odds. If *we* fail to help the forces of democracy, these forces will suffer severely—not because their cause lacks merit but because the communists will have shown more determination than we.

A strengthened democratic resistance is the only way to force the Nicaraguan communists to halt subversion in this hemisphere; it is the only way to counter their stifling tyranny at home.

Power and diplomacy must go hand in hand. That is a lesson we should have learned by now. Diplomacy without leverage is impotent. Whether in arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union or in the resolution of regional conflicts, diplomacy works best when our opponents realize they cannot win military victory or unilateral advantage. Sometimes we have forgotten that lesson and paid the price.

That is the lesson we are seeking to apply in Nicaragua today: we are trying to convince the communist regime that a military option does not exist. Only stout internal resistance by the Nicaraguan people can pressure the regime into seeking national reconciliation and fulfilling the democratic promise of 1979.

Consequences of Inaction

If we do not strengthen the resistance, our worry in the future will be a very different one—a far more serious one. Our worry will then be a Soviet and Cuban base on the mainland of Latin America, a regime whose consolidated power will allow it to spread subversion and terrorism throughout the hemisphere.

Nor is that all. If the Nicaraguan communists succeed in consolidating their power and in destroying the democratic resistance, their victory would immediately boost radical forces everywhere that rely on violence, militarism, and terrorism to achieve their ends—particularly in Latin America. Radicalism will seem irresistible; the forces of moderation and democracy will be disheartened. *All* the countries in Latin America, who *all* face serious internal economic problems, will see radical forces emboldened to exploit these problems for their own destructive ends.

A communist victory in Nicaragua would also have global repercussions for U.S. policy. It would severely damage our credibility with adversaries who would test our mettle and with those around the world who rely on us for support in their battles against tyranny. If democratic aspiration is snuffed out in Nicaragua, then where can we claim to nurture it or protect it? If an armed aggressor on our own doorstep is allowed to have its way, despite enormous opposition inside the country and out, then how can our reputation for deterring aggression be credible in places farther removed?

The bipartisan Kissinger commission put it starkly in its 1984 report, listing the possible consequences of a failure to

contain the present conflict in Central America. The consequences included:

- A series of developments which might require us to devote large resources to defend the southern approaches to the United States, thus reducing our capacity to defend our interests elsewhere....
- A proliferation of Marxist-Leninist states that would increase violence, dislocation, and political repression in the region.
- The erosion of our power to influence events worldwide that would flow from the perception that we were unable to influence vital events close to home.

Whose Vision?

This brings me to my final point. In the long run, the debate over military aid to the Nicaraguan resistance is no partisan affair. It is a debate over what moral and political principles shall inspire the future of this hemisphere, over whose vision will be allowed to prevail. One vision—the vision of democrats throughout the Americas—calls for economic progress, free institutions, and the rule of law. The other is a vision of two, three, many Nicaraguas—a hemisphere of burning churches, suppressed newspapers, and crushed opposition.

The Nicaraguan dictatorship may soon have the power to dog the resistance to its death. The United States *now* has the power to prevent that tragic outcome. Will we allow this hemisphere to be taken hostage by totalitarians? That is the question that the Congress faces. For the security of our own country and of the young democracies who turn to us for support, we should give the Nicaraguan people what they need to struggle for the freedoms that were denied them by Somoza and then snatched from them by an armed communist minority. ■

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